

THE

DUTY AND RESPONSIBILITY

OF

Private Judgment in Religion:

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL SOCIETY FOR THE
PROMOTION OF EVANGELICAL KNOWLEDGE,
OCTOBER 9, 1853,

AT

Saint George's Church, New York.

BY

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New York:

DEPOSITORY OF THE EVANGELICAL KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY,
No. 10 American Bible House, Astor Place.

1853.

*Extract from the Minutes of the Second Triennial Meeting of the
Protestant Episcopal Society for the Promotion of Evangelical
Knowledge, held in St. Mark's Church, New York, Oct. 11, 1853.*

On motion, *Resolved unanimously*, That the thanks of this Society be presented to the Rev. S. H. TYNG, D. D., for the Sermon preached before them, on Sunday evening, the 9th inst., and that he be requested to furnish a copy to the Executive Committee for publication.

(Attest)

H. ANTHON, *Sec. pro tem.*

SERMON.

ST. LUKE, XII. 57.

“Why, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right?”

THE revelation of the Gospel, places every man to whom it comes, upon the ground of his own personal responsibility before God. It gives him the right, and it lays upon him the obligation, of personal judgment, and personal voluntary action, in the great concerns of his own soul, as the dearest and most valuable privilege in the possession of man. It sets before him every possible advantage, it offers him every desirable means of improvement, for the welfare of his soul for eternity; and then requires him honestly to judge with the light he has received, and freely to act, according to the opportunities which have been presented to him. It connects also a responsibility with the exercise of this liberty of personal choice and judgment in religious things, which is the most serious and abiding responsibility that man can bear. It offers all the amazing privileges of clear intelligence of the will and character of God, and of free and acceptable access to the presence and favour of God,

and then announces with great solemnity the principle—"For all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

The Saviour appeals to this right and recognises this responsibility in the text before us—He addresses himself to the *people*, verse 54, "He said also to *the people*." They were accustomed to reason, and to judge with accuracy, of far less important and far more uncertain things, than the great and plain question of religious authority and interest, which He had set before them. "When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say there cometh a shower; and so it is: and when ye see the south wind blow, ye say there will be heat; and it cometh to pass." The face of the sky, and the prospects of the earth, they could calculate for themselves,—and they habitually calculated rightly. Now he had placed before them—the people of Israel—the ample evidences of his divine authority, in the displays of the wisdom and power which he possessed; he had submitted to them a question in which their everlasting personal welfare was involved; and he required of them their own faithful and intelligent examination of the testimony which he had brought before them. He demands of them, why they did not renounce the blinding authority of the Scribes and Pharisees, which led them to reject his message and his mission, and even of themselves judge in the question which he had thus submitted to them—"Ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? yea, and why, even of your-

selves, judge ye not what is right?" His appeal is not to the Church authorities of Israel, as if the people were bound to submit their judgments to them, but to the people themselves, in opposition to their authorities. This was a personal, individual question for each of them; a question, the decision of which was infinitely and individually important to each of them; and while they must bear the individual responsibility of its decision, they were bound to consider and decide it for themselves. If he were the Christ, they were to receive him as such, and to discern and embrace the salvation which he brought. This acceptance of him as the Christ the Saviour, was an individual, private interest and act for each of them. The whole welfare of their souls was involved in the question, and they could not avoid the responsibility of judging for themselves, and were bound to judge what was right.

I desire to speak of this duty of personal consideration and judgment in the great matters of divine revelation. It is at all times a duty, and a right, of unspeakable importance. It was never attended with more peculiar responsibility and consequence, than at the present time, and in our land and our church.

The disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ claim this high privilege, in all the concerns of religion, and in all the questions of their individual relations to God, as an inalienable right and obligation. They are compelled in these relations to bear the sole responsibility before God. They must each answer for themselves; they must stand or fall to their own master. "If they are wise, they are wise for themselves; if

they scorn, they alone shall bear it." The everlasting results of their own decision they must personally meet; and no man can give to God a ransom for his brother. They therefore claim, and they must be allowed, the right of exercising their own judgments, in all questions connected with this personal responsibility, under the instruction and guidance of that Blessed Spirit whose office it is to lead the Lord's disciples into all truth. They can allow no man to have dominion over their faith. Human authorities may be received as helps and ministers in the path of truth. But they must call no man master, on the earth. One is their master, even Christ.

If the Lord could so directly appeal to the people of Israel for a right decision in the immense question of the acknowledgment of his own authority, with how much more justice and force may the appeal be now made to the people who are living under all the increased advantages of his perfected Dispensation; who have in their possession the complete Scriptures given by inspiration of God, and are able to read and hear in their own tongues the wonderful works of God—to compare spiritual things with spiritual, and thus to discern the mind of Christ.

I.—Let us first consider the proper limits of this obligation of personal judgment in religion, and define its proper operation. We speak of it in our present relation, as especially connected with the doctrines and duties of revealed religion. We are accustomed to call it, technically, the right of conscience; that is,

the right in every man to determine for himself, and within himself, unfettered by the authority of other men, his own proper line and course of personal religious duty. It is the privilege which is secured to every man, by the sacred Word of God, of examining for himself the claims which are asserted upon his obedience and submission; of determining for himself the proper degree and course of this submission, in all the things which constitute his personal relation to God, or affect his own eternal interests before God, the responsibility of which judgment and action he alone is to bear before the judgment seat of God.

1. It is the obligation to judge that which is right. It is a right founded upon divine authority, and is never, therefore, independent of that authority. When God has distinctly spoken to man, either in the teachings of revealed truth, or in a direction for personal duty, there every question is settled, and every claim for liberty from this divine authority is silenced.

This is undoubtedly the fact in regard to the positive divine commands. When God has said, "Thou shalt not steal,—thou shalt not kill," there remains no right of question or consideration to man. His line of duty is simple, uniform, and unmurmuring obedience. He has nothing to do but humbly and unchangeably to submit to divine authority. No choice is presented, or can be justly presented, to his mind.

This is equally the fact in regard to the clear divine revelations of truth. When God has spoken plainly upon any subject, man has no room for choice. When he says, "This is my beloved Son, hear him," or

when he declares, "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby they can be saved,"—there is left to man no liberty of choice. So far as the divine authority is concerned, he has no question to consider. He has no right to reject or to postpone obedience to the undoubted voice of God. His line of duty is perfectly unclouded and distinct. What God has manifestly spoken, is right, and only right; and man is bound to conform to his mind and will, and of himself also to judge what is right. He has simply to satisfy himself that God has thus commanded or spoken, and then to yield completely to his word. His privilege of judgment, given by divine authority, acknowledges frankly the authority which thus directs and limits it.

2. It is an obligation and right of judgment not wholly independent either of the interests and claims of his fellow men. It cannot be justly exercised to the destruction of the community of Christians in which he is placed, or to the contempt of the actual, revealed, and divinely imparted authority of the outward visible Church of God with which he has been connected. The social claims and interests of the Gospel are of vast importance. The unity of the body of Christ—even its external apparent unity—is of great consequence and value. The influence which we are to exercise upon each other, and which we do actually exercise upon each other, even in the great concerns of our everlasting salvation, makes up a very important portion of our present duty and of our

future responsibility. There are acts of scriptural established discipline and government, in which we are bound to "hear the Church;" to yield our own private will to the benefit of others, or to the common edification and to the authority of the Christian community to which in the providence of God we have been subjected. St. Matt. xviii. 17, the Saviour directs us, in a case of specified individual difficulty, to "tell it unto the Church;" and decides that the obstinate refusal to listen, or submit, in such a case, to the authority of the Church, shall constitute a man an outcast from the privileges which it gives. "If he will not hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." The manifest intention of this is, that a man is bound in such a question of personal temporal interest or difficulty—not a question of religious truth or of divine revelation—to concede his own judgment and will to the edification and the decision of his brethren in the Christian community to which he belongs. In the influence of our whole course of religious faith and duty, we are to "seek the things which make for peace, and the things wherewith one may edify another." We are to use all power and right, which has been intrusted individually to us, "for edification, not for destruction." We are to "mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine of Christ, and avoid them." Them which "*cause* divisions." This is the guilt; not the division itself. Division becomes the resulting duty—"avoid them." How can this be, without division? We are to "endeavour to keep the unity of

the Spirit in the bond of peace," but not to sacrifice truth for peace.

The principle, upon which this required concession of our own judgment and will to the judgment of the body, and to the edification of others, rests, is very apparent. It is, our personal responsibility for the salvation of each other, in the degree of our appointed influence, and our duty to exercise upon others, the ministry for Christ with which each Christian is empowered. For this end, we are bound to unite with other disciples of the Lord, in an outward, manifest community, and to use our personal liberty as Christians in due regard for the spiritual and eternal welfare of other servants of our Lord Christ. We had better eat no meat while the world standeth, than to hinder, by our indulgences, the salvation of those for whom Christ died. In reference, therefore, to the spiritual welfare of our fellow-men, we are also bound to judge for ourselves that which is right; and the consideration and consultation of this, becomes a duty of immediate and imperative divine obligation.

3. The obligation and right of personal judgment, of which we speak, is the individual right of every Christian to examine and judge, by the standard of the infallible Word of God, all the religious teaching of men—all the inculcations of professed truth and duty, whether in the Church or out of the Church; and to receive, or to reject, the things which are brought to him, by whom-

soever they may be brought, according to their manifest agreement, or want of agreement, with this Word of God. The duty of every Christian man is thus to judge, for himself, what is right. The responsibility of this judgment rests upon him. The results of it he must meet and eternally bear. The right and privilege of it, therefore, should be guarded and defended by him with great solicitude and care. He is himself to see that his judgment is righteous judgment—that he judges according to truth—that he speaks according to the oracles of God. If he truly seek for guidance from God, and sincerely desire to do the will of God, he has the promise that he shall not be suffered to go vitally astray, and shall know, of every doctrine, whether it be of God. The meek will God guide in judgment, and teach them the truth of his Word.

II.—This obligation and right of personal judgment in religion, is founded upon the divine authority of the Word of God. The testimonies of the Holy Scripture upon this subject are very remarkable, and exceedingly full. Our present text is a very distinct testimony upon this subject. The Saviour presents to the people the whole subject of his mission to the earth, and the effects which it was to produce, and remonstrates with them upon their unnecessary ignorance, and sinful unwillingness to judge according to the truth. In St. John v. 39, he urges “the Jews”—the multitude of people to whom he was speaking—to search the

Scriptures, for themselves, for the testimony which they contained concerning himself. The living authorities of the outward Church of God were among them. But he deferred nothing to their authority, in a question like this. They had combined together to reject him, and the truth which he taught. And he directed the people, of whom these rulers were ready to say, they “knew not the law, and were cursed,” to go from them to the written Word of God, to search, and judge for themselves what was right. St. John iii. 10, the Saviour reproves Nicodemus, one of the best of these officers of the Church of Israel, for his manifest ignorance of the Scriptures, especially upon the very subjects of their peculiar divine revelation—“Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?”

The Saviour warns his disciples, St. Luke viii. 18, of the responsibility attending this open publication of divine truth—“Take heed *how* ye hear.” The privilege of hearing the Word of God is great, and men are to be held accountable for the spirit and state of mind with which they hear it. Nay, he warns them again, St. Mark iv. 24, to “take heed *what* they hear.” They are themselves made the judges of the teaching which they receive; and they are to be careful, in rejecting that which is injurious and untrue, as well as in receiving that which is valuable and pure. St. Matthew vii. 15, He commands them to beware of false prophets, describing thus those who professed to be teachers

of religion. They are to judge of these teachers, not by their commission, but by their character, their manifest fruits. They are not to respect one that, by this testimony is evidently a wolf, because he comes in the garb of a sheep. They are to avoid him, to reject him, to beware of him. I know not how any passage could more clearly describe the right and obligation of which I speak. It is of no consequence what are the pretensions of men to authority. The conformity of their characters and teaching to the Word of God, is to determine whether they are to be rejected or received. And the people to whom they come are thus constituted, by our Lord himself, in the plainest possible terms, the judges of this fact. No outward authority can constitute a manifestly wicked man a divinely commissioned teacher; and men are, unhesitatingly, to reject such an one, and to beware of him. Again, St. Matthew xxiv. 23, our Lord warns his disciples against such men, in the doctrines which they teach, as well as in the fruits of their example. He directs them not to go after them, nor to believe them. These disciples are themselves constituted the judges of this false teaching, and of its opposition to the Word of God, and for this fact are to refuse it.

These are but some instances of the Lord's personal directions in this matter. He sends men thus to no infallible living guidance in the persons of other men, but to the standard of the divinely inspired Word. And he requires them, according to this standard, either to receive or to reject the teaching which

they hear. They are themselves to judge what is right.

The Apostles urged the very same obligation and right upon all Christians. They constantly referred to the inspired Scriptures for the proofs of their assertions of doctrine. The whole current of their public addresses in the Acts, from the 3d chapter to the 20th, furnishes numerous illustrations of this principle and habit. Their constant appeal is to the written testimonies of the word of God. But every such appeal, of course, constituted their hearers the judges of the instructions which they received, and of the conformity of these instructions to those Scriptures which had been given them by Divine inspiration and to which they thus referred. The guilt which was charged upon those who refused to believe, was the guilt of rejecting the written word of God. In Acts xvii. 11 we find the Bereans highly commended, even when inspired Apostles preached to them, not because they humbly received new and unintelligible dogmas upon the mere authority of those who came to teach them, but because they searched the Scriptures, in a faith which would understand for itself, whether what Paul and Silas taught them was accordant with what God had previously spoken. They thus did the will of God, in judging of the doctrine, whether it were of God, or whether these men spake of themselves. How very opposite was this searching spirit, which God commends in the Bereans, to the state of mind which would be now commended, by those who deride this sacred right and duty, which

these Bereans maintained, and insist upon a mere implicit faith, in the people, in teachers of supposed Divine authority. St. Paul appeals to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. x. 15 for their own judgment in the question of the nature and purposes of the Lord's Supper,—a question which is often now represented as one of the most difficult and mysterious in the whole Christian system. "I speak as to wise men," he says, "judge ye what I say." He declares to the Galatians, ii. 5, his own determination always to judge for himself in these questions of religious truth and authority, and not to give place by subjection, even for an hour, to those who tried to bring him into bondage to mere human authority. Of these persons he says, in a very remarkable manner, "they seemed to be somewhat;" they had the profession and aspect, perhaps the station, of authority; but whosoever they were, it made no matter to him; God accepteth no man's person. The highest ecclesiastical authority, even James, and Cephas, and John, who "seemed to be pillars," were nothing to him, in comparison with the sacred and settled word of God. He urges the Galatians, v. 1, to unite with him in the same determination, to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, and not to be entangled by any yoke of bondage; nay, in the first chapter he bids them reject even an angel from heaven, who would set up another Gospel than the inspired Scriptures revealed. St. John, 1 Jno. iv. 1, exhorts Christians to a trial even of professed inspiration. He commands us to give no implicit faith to every professed teacher,

because there were many false prophets already gone out into the world. In his ii. 10, he commands them not to receive teachers of false doctrine into their houses, nor to bid them God speed, lest they should be partakers of their evil deeds. The Saviour commends the Christians of Ephesus, Rev. ii. 2, because they had tried and had rejected false teachers; and Rev. xx. 4, he pronounces an everlasting blessing upon those who had refused all connection with the corrupt and anti-christian teaching and dominion of Babylon, or Papal Rome.

Now, these are some gathered illustrations, and divine securities, of this obligation and privilege of personal judgment in religion, among the many which the Holy Scriptures contain. They describe the duty and right, of which we speak, as made the portion of all the Lord's disciples. No man, nor men, nor succession of men, can ever be allowed the authority, or permitted in fact, to force upon us any religious doctrines or obligations, but upon the manifest testimony of the inspired Word of God. There you are bound to carry the instructions of every teacher; to try them by that standard; to receive and employ them, if they accord with it; to reject and renounce them, as having no light or truth in them, if they do not agree with that. You cannot too highly reverence the authority of the Holy Scriptures. You cannot be too cautious in allowing any teaching of men to stand upon the same level. In them God speaks to you, and he will not give his glory to another, and it is for you always, under their guidance and teaching, yourselves

to judge that which is right. The connection of inspired Scripture with human teaching is perfectly precipitous. When you come from it to the highest uninspired man, you plunge from the hard land, at once, into the deep sea. And to whatever or whomsoever would assume the authority of inspiration, apart from this sacred testimony, you are to say, without hesitation, "Upage Satana"—"Get thee behind me, Satan; thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

2. This important right of personal judgment, which God has thus given in his Word to all to whom his Word shall come, our own Church acknowledges and secures, in the clearest possible manner. Here, in this Church, at least, is there to be no dominion over the faith of men, other than that which the sacred Word of God shall manifestly appear to establish and impose. In the Thirty-nine Articles of our Church, which every minister is bound to subscribe, as the summary of Christian doctrine which he is to teach, this privilege and duty of its members is provided for in the most decided and intelligible language. So that the Church seems to take up the very demand of the Lord, as addressed to all who acknowledge its authority also,—“Why, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right?”

Art. 6 declares that “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of *any* man, that it should be

believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." What, then, is the question which this Church proposes to "any man"—to every one to whom professed religious teaching is offered—but "Can the doctrine which I now hear be found in Holy Scripture? or may it be proved thereby?" How is he to settle this question, but by searching the Scriptures to see for himself? He is to judge for himself that which is right. He is thus commanded to reject, and not to believe as an article of faith, everything which cannot endure this test. He is to prove all things, to hold fast that which is good, and is himself made, of necessity, the judge of this all-important question for himself.

In Art. 8, the two creeds, which are short summaries of Christian doctrine, transmitted from the earliest—perhaps one of them even from the Apostles' times—are commanded to be "thoroughly received and believed, for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture." Even these venerable symbols of doctrine are not imposed upon men by mere Church authority, but are openly submitted to the examination and judgment of all, in this assertion of their Scriptural truth, and to be received from their conformity to this truth.

In Art. 19, the language upon this point is very precise and positive. "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments

be duly ministered, according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same." But here, again, the question whether the doctrine which is heard, and the sacraments which are ministered, in any professed Church, are according to the pure Word of God, is of necessity left to every Christian, to examine and settle for himself. He alone is constituted the judge, by the very statement of the Article, which directs him how, and when, and by what marks, he may find the visible Church of Christ, with which he is to become connected.

Art. 20 is even more positive still upon this subject. "It is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written; neither may it so expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree anything against the same, so, besides the same, ought it not to enforce anything to be believed, for necessity of salvation." But who is to be the judge? Who can be the judge whether the teaching which is heard from the Church be according to God's Word written, or whether the ministers of the Church do actually expound one place of Scripture repugnant to another, but the people, to whom the command is given, and for whom the exposition is made? With whatever antiquity, or apparent authority, manifest errors and unscriptural doctrines may be clothed, our Protestant Church

makes it the duty of its members to try them by the Word of God, and to reject them if they cannot endure that test.

I need not carry these quotations further. Our own Church thus, in its avowed fundamental articles of faith, solemnly secures to all its members, and faithfully guards for them, the great Scriptural right and responsibility of private personal judgment, in all questions connected with their religious duty and their individual relations towards God. God has given us this right. Our Church acknowledges and enforces its discharge, professing not to have dominion over our faith, but to be the helper of our joy. It becomes us, therefore, as members of this Church, to maintain and exercise this right, with the utmost intelligence and information of the truth which we can bring into operation in connection with it, but never to yield it to any authority of man. We must try the spirits of professed teachers and prophets, whether they are of God.

III.—I wish now to bring the consideration of this general right into direct application to our own peculiar circumstances and responsibility.

There are two great systems and methods of professed religious influence and authority, which in different shapes have ever been contending in the world, wherever the promises and commands of a divine revelation have been proclaimed, and which are now mingling in a very remarkable contest and contrast in our day. We feel their pres-

sure—we listen to their appeals—we hear their reciprocal proposals and demands every day, and in almost every religious relation. They press us, particularly, in the present discussions in our own Church and the Church of England. Between them we must judge, for ourselves, what is right. And, according to the command of our Church, we must carry the teaching of each to the Holy Scriptures, and examine them for ourselves by that infallible test.

The *first* system—which is an outward, sensuous system—teaches that man is to be saved for ever, by an alleged personal union with Christ, exclusively through the outward sacraments and ordinances of the visible Church; that a certain selected organization of this Church is alone clothed with divine authority; and the man who would be saved, must submit his judgment and will to this authority, and look for his salvation in the appointments of this Church.

The *second* system—which is an inward, spiritual system—teaches that man is to be saved by a spiritual union, or connection of his soul, with Christ, through the inward power of the Holy Spirit, enlightening, instructing, and sanctifying his individual mind and heart, by the agency of the Word of God; and that he is, therefore, to be guided solely by the simple authority of the Sacred Scripture, and has the right to hear its instructions, to examine its testimonies, and to judge of its precepts for himself.

The *first* would operate upon man for his sal-

vation, by bringing him into a blind subjection to Church authority, and a passive submission to Church ordinances ; and persuade him that thus, through outward material applications—I might justly say, if I referred to the follies of some modern books, through the very absorbent vessels of his perishing body—he is to be made unconsciously one with Christ, by being one with that outward society of men who claim exclusively to belong to Christ, and to be the body of Christ.

The *second* would lead man to embrace the truth of God, in the intelligent and affectionate submission of his own will to him—to yield his mind and heart in joyful confidence, to Christ, by the inward conscious action of his own spirit, under the promised teaching of the Spirit of God ; and thus to be made personally, spiritually alive by a living faith in Christ, and then to unite in the outward sacraments of the Gospel, as a confession of the Saviour's name, and a profession of the life which he has already received from him.

The *first* would multiply formal services and outward imposing rites, to awe and influence the minds of men by their sensual authority ; would impress upon them the peculiar importance and solemnity of this outward conformity, because grace is appointed to operate through its instrumentality, and cares comparatively but little for the preaching of the Gospel, or the offering of salvation to the minds and hearts of individual men.

The *second* would unceasingly preach to men the

truth of God, especially the complete salvation and the glorious Saviour whom this word of truth reveals ; would urge their intelligent and voluntary acceptance of Him as a chosen ruler and portion for themselves, and their simple confidence in his worth and power, thus divinely revealed and perceived ; and then would enjoin that measure of outward conformity to religious rites, which does all things according to the Saviour's will, and in obedience to his commands, decently and in order.

The *first* appeals to man to submit to an alleged perpetuated authority in this professed outward Church ; to receive its interpretations and impositions without question of their accuracy ; to renounce all judgment of his own, as ungodly pride, in humble deference to this assumed inherited infallibility, and to esteem it a sufficient reason for his avowed faith and hope, that thus the Church has taught.

The *second* presents to man, for his guidance and instruction, the inspired arguments and teaching of the Holy Scripture ; bids him search and see for himself what God hath spoken, to allow his faith to stand in no wisdom of man, but in the power of God, and to receive or reject the teachings of men, and of all men, as he finds them to be, or not to be, accordant with the teaching of God.

The *first* brings to man, personally, a professed living ministry of men, declares its infallibility from error, requires his docile and unquestioning subjection to its teaching, and forbids all judgment of his own upon its authority or truth.

The *second* gives to man a really infallible Bible, and entreats him to examine it for himself, with the promised guidance of the Spirit of God to lead him into all truth, looking to a living ministry but as to an appointed provision subordinate to this divine teaching, to help him to understand it, and to assist him in obeying it.

The *first* directs him, when he is awakened in spirit and anxious in mind, to go to outward visible ordinances, to find his peace in an obedient conformity to them, bidding him to hope, and promising him salvation as the result of his own continued submission to these prescribed duties and rites.

The *second* directs him to the already completed obedience and death of the Son of God, as the Mediator for man, offers him a perfect salvation in the infinite worth of that one sacrifice, and bids him to believe in his heart in the truth and the adequacy of this glorious and sufficient mediation, and find an everlasting rest in the conscious confidence of his soul in Christ.

The *first* bids him to satisfy his inquiring mind by asking, Do I belong to the true Church? teaching that Christ dispenses his blessings exclusively through its ministrations, and warns him not to be satisfied until he has adequately settled this question. But for this fact, with strange inconsistency, it has to acknowledge the right and the obligation and the competency of the man's own judgment in himself, though it would limit the exercise of this judgment to a mere decision of this one question, and then demand a voluntary

subjection of himself to the Church authority which he has thus discovered—I might say, thus created—and to a consent to be held in final captivity by that; he must frame the idol for himself, and then worship it as a supreme authority for him.

The *second* bids him inquire, Am I in Christ, through the Spirit? and for this to examine, not the Church, but himself; not the dry records of human assumption, but the living fruits of the Spirit in his own soul; not whether Jesus Christ is in an outward ministry, but whether Christ is formed in him, the hope of glory, knowing that Jesus Christ is in him, except he be reprobate.

The *first* teaches him that true religion is a corporate or partnership concern, in which he partakes by virtue of his fellowship with the true Church, a fellowship commencing with his entrance upon this outward partnership in Baptism; that he is in communion with Christ, because he is in communion with the Church; so that in some way, this whole body being holy, the comparative deficiencies of some members may be made up by the abounding excellencies of others.

The *second* teaches him that true piety is his own individual, secret, personal concern, with the joys and bitterness of which no man can intermeddle; that the great privilege of the Gospel is to bring him, alone, acceptable, and in peace to God, in Jesus Christ; and however outward helps may be used and sanctified for his soul's comfort and welfare, no outward agency has the right to stand for one moment between his soul and a redeeming God.

The *first* proposes the Church as the original, to which all obedient men are to be successively united. Of course, before the first man became obedient, this Church was a mere abstract notion; but the blessing, nevertheless, is in this abstract Church, and the individual man is only to get it by coming there.

The *second* makes the individual saved man the original; and considers the Church the subsequent collection and union of these saved men, to whom the Lord is pleased to add daily, in succeeding ages, those who are saved.

The *first* supposes the ministry to be the first appointed agency, and the Church of God to be built upon that.

The *second* supposes the Church of God to be first collected and called, and then the ministry to be given to it, for the perfecting of the saints and the edifying of the body of Christ.

The *first* of these two systems is the animal, sensuous, ceremonial system of Idolatry, Pharisaism, and Popery; and wherever it is to be found, and in whatever degree in operation, it is the same—the work of the enemy, to mimic, pervert, and overthrow the right ways of the Lord.

The *second*, is the system of Scriptural, Apostolic, and Protestant instruction; the system of the living, holy Word of God.

In the one, the Church is to cleanse the heart, and to save the soul, by washing and feeding the outward body of the man.

In the other, Christ alone is to save, by teaching

and ruling the hidden soul through his Spirit; making the streams pure, by first cleansing the fountain of the heart.

The principle of the first, is self-justification, by the influence and worth of man's own outward ordinances and words.

The principle of the second, is justification wholly in Christ, salvation by his merit and power alone, received and rested upon in the heart by faith.

These two systems, as they have been always in contest on the earth, are now again in very open conflict before us. And men must judge, and will judge, between them. The responsibility and results of this personal judgment we must bear for ourselves. And we have an infinite interest at stake in the question which is at issue. It may be far easier to flesh and blood to throw aside an intelligent and faithful study of the Scriptures, because it is troublesome and possibly uncertain, and to yield passively to the audible dictates of a fellow-man. But then, why did God give us the *Bible*? And SUCH A BIBLE! So full and plenteous in all manner of store for the mind, and heart, and soul of man! Why did he occupy four thousand years of human history in preparing the way for man's redemption, and two thousand years in the employment of men to write the history of the work, and to record its invitations, and promises, and provisions, if after all, it was to be a mere dead letter to the race, and the multitudes were to be saved, not by their own knowledge and intelligent acceptance of this truth of God, but by some perfunctory performance

of outward, mysterious rites, by a selected few in their behalf? If man were to be dealt with as a mere passive animal, and the salvation provided for him, were to be communicated to him by the mere exterior appliance of religious ceremonies, mere cutaneous juxtaposition, how simple was the undertaking! How complicated and unnecessary seems the actual, apparent revelation!

Having begun in the Spirit, are we to be made *perfect* in the flesh? Our Church can never yield to a corrupting influence like this, but with its complete annihilation and entire absorption in the anti-christian establishment of Rome. The Scriptural basis upon which we are founded, the supremacy which is given to the divine teaching of the Scriptures in our public worship, the faithful maintenance of Apostolic and Protestant principles in our Articles, render the influence and efforts of corrupters, though annoying, yet nugatory, until our Liturgy can be overthrown, and our whole beautiful and perfect system of discipline and order crushed in the dust.

What then? The result of our consideration is, that we hear the Church—that we hear our own Church—and go back to the inspired truth of God, and examine, and hear, and read, and understand, the Bible for ourselves; insisting, in all public or social teaching, upon accurate conformity to the testimony of God. It is far easier to identify the inspired Scriptures, than an imaginary infallible Church; and to understand the simple teaching of this actually sufficient Scripture, than to comprehend the mystical utterances of this assuming power among men.

The warrant for this alleged Church authority, is declared to be the Sacred Scriptures of God. The very persons who would require us to submit to it, are constrained to appeal to our own judgments upon the Scriptures, to ascertain its existence. But surely, if the Scriptures can teach us clearly this most difficult point, it can adequately teach all others which are needful. If we are competent to judge that which is right in this, we are equally so in any other instructions which the same Word reveals; and the whole discussion can rationally end only in exalting the importance and worth of this Sacred Word, and leading the mind humbly to adopt it, and yield to it, and thankfully to acknowledge God's amazing goodness in having provided it as a sufficient lamp to the feet in the path of life.

Well then may I appeal to all who hear me, in Elijah's words to the people of his day, when this very conflict was raging there. "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." This is a question in which there is, there can be, no middle ground. We can yield, in matters unimportant and expedient merely, to peace and union, or the weakness of conscience in our brethren. But when it comes to the great question between the Lord and Baal,—between the flesh and the spirit,—between Christ and the authority of men,—we can neither yield nor halt. Here the feeble is to be like David, and "the pots in the Lord's house like the bowls before the altar." Here every intelligent mind is to stand, set like a flint

against all the arts, the hostility, the corruptions, the sneers, or the blustering and persecutions of men. The trial may be great. The contest may be long. The advocates of truth may be few. We may appear to be sometimes almost alone. But heed not this. Far rather would I hide my face with Elijah on Carmel, in solitary faith and prayer, and look out for God's reviving showers, which are sure at last to come, than ride with Ahab in his chariot, in temporary victory over all the interests of righteousness and truth and God. The cloud of hope may be small. Be it so. The promise is in a higher hand than man's, and the believing soul will not be confounded or ashamed at last.

Need I say, that to take this stand of truth for God, is the great object and purpose of this Society. It stands as a beacon among us to call our attention to the safe and well discriminated paths of Evangelical truth, and to warn against the bewildering, tortuous tracks of error, and the concealed pits of superstition and apostacy. We mean it to be a great witness for the truth in the Church, and the witness for a Church that keeps the truth, in the world; and, the constantly enlarging agency, to spread in the Church the knowledge and love and truth of Christ, and to extend in the world a Church thus enlightened and animated by the clear knowledge and life-giving love of a divine Saviour. It is to help men to judge what is right, to urge them constantly to exercise this judgment, and to enable them to extend the knowledge of what is right to others, until, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon

the work, our Church shall be as pure in its visible members, as it is in its inherited standards of truth; and as powerful in its actual agency to save the world, as it is accurate and faithful in its recorded testimony to His power and glory by whom alone the world can be saved. This is the ground of our union here, and this is the ground of our appeal to you and to others to help us in the great and important work for which we are thus united.

